Original citation: Slavtcheva-Petkova, V. (2013). "I'm from Europe, but I'm Not European": Television and children's identities in England and Bulgaria. *Journal of Children and Media, 7(3),* 349-365.
DOI:10.1080/17482798.2012.740416

"I'M FROM EUROPE, BUT I'M NOT EUROPEAN": TELEVISION AND CHILDREN'S IDENTITIES IN ENGLAND AND BULGARIA

Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova

Department of Media, University of Chester, Chester, UK

Room CKW150, Kingsway Buildings, Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ, UK

Email: v.petkova@chester.ac.uk

Tel: (+44) (1244) 515-727

Vera Slavtcheva-Petkova (PhD) is Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Chester, UK. She has published work related to children's European identities and media representations of Europe and the European Union. After completing her doctoral studies at Loughborough University, UK, Vera worked at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford on a project investigating the evidence for the harms experienced of children as a result of online risks. In her current research she explores two main topics: the use and content of You Tube videos of pro-eating disorders and recent changes in journalistic practices in Eastern Europe.

This article examines the role television (TV) plays in the development of primary school children's European knowledge and identities in England and Bulgaria. It compares the media coverage on Europe and the European Union with pupils' European perceptions and identities. The article reports data from 174 qualitative interviews with children and the content analysis of seven TV programmes. It concludes that TV plays a strong role in collective identities when a topic is salient on the agenda. TV raises awareness and knowledge and sets the direction of understanding. Yet, despite the higher salience of Europe on the Bulgarian media agenda, Bulgarians feel less European than English children. The article provides an

explanation to this phenomenon, thus filling an important gap in the literature about the media's role in collective identities formation from an early age. It also adopts an innovative approach in the study of agenda-setting theory by investigating its application among children.

KEYWORDS children; TV; European identity; agenda setting; socialization; Bulgaria; United Kingdom.

"I've heard on TV that Europe is beautiful." "On the news they say that Europe is very beautiful, there are a lot of things that we don't have here. It is more advanced than us, much more." The quotations come from interviews with 10-year-old children. Apparently, both have heard news stories about Europe, but the first child replies negatively when asked "Are you European?" while the second one defines himself as European. The question this article addresses is what role the mass media play in children's collective identities, and particularly a transnational European identity. To provide a more general and well-rounded perspective, it compares the situation in two very different countries – in the Eastern European country of Bulgaria and in the Western European country of England. Both are geographically part of the continent of Europe and politically members of the European Union (EU), though the former entered the organization in 2007 with a significant level of support from the public, whereas the latter has been in the EU since 1973 but is notorious for its Euroscepticism. Bulgaria is the poorest EU member, while England is among the richest.

Why Children, Europe and the Media?

Why is the topic about the relationship between children, the mass media and collective identities both relevant and worthwhile? What answers does current literature provide and what is the best way to approach it theoretically? This initial section addresses

these questions by looking at the media's role in forming collective identities and children's importance both as audiences and as potent participants in the identity process.

The link between children's collective identities and mass communication has hardly been explored in media studies. The majority of studies concentrate on adults' or adolescents' identities, mainly gender (Gauntlett, 2002; Morley, 2000) and racial/ethnic (Downing & Husband, 2005; Georgiou, 2001), and less often national (Schlesinger, 1991) or European (Bruter, 2005; Hengst, 1997; Schlesinger, 1997). Moreover, explanations are rare when it comes to accounting for the exact role the media play. Although Madianou (2005) claims that the "media/identity relationship is not a causal one" and "the media do not shape identities," she acknowledges that "they do contribute, through a number of practices, to the creation of symbolic communicative spaces" (p. 5). Arguments for the link between media and collective identities are perhaps strongest in nationalism studies. Academics (Anderson, 1991; Billig, 1995) have argued that the media are vital for the creation and reproduction of the nation. For Anderson (1991, p. 6), the printing press made possible the "imagining" of the nation. Similarly, for Billig (1995), nationalism has become banal because through the mass media "daily, the nation is indicated, or 'flagged,' in the lives of its citizenry" (p. 6). Building on Billig's (1995) banal nationalism concept, Cram (2009) even claims that there is evidence of EU-focused banal Europeanism, though her argument is not entirely supported by data. If we accept, then, that the media are actively engaged in the creation and development of collective identities, even though the relationship is not causal, how do we measure the role the mass media play in children's European knowledge and identities?

A possible solution is provided in a European parliament official report, later quoted by the European commission and widely used in subsequent academic studies. In it, it is argued that "a European identity will only develop if Europeans are adequately informed" (European Commission, 1984, p. 2). Information is, therefore, seen as a key prerequisite for

developing European identity. This suggests that one way of measuring whether Europeans are informed about Europe would be by investigating the topic's presence on the media agenda. However, we cannot make assumptions about the significance of the topic for a concrete group of individuals, namely 9-10-year-old children, without actually comparing the correspondence of their views and knowledge of Europe and/or the EU with those dominating the media agenda. Another pitfall to be avoided is the reliance on a single survey question when establishing the public agenda such as "What are you most concerned about these days? That is, regardless of what politicians say, what are the two or three main things which you think the government should concentrate on doing something about?" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 178).

Although this approach is common in agenda-setting studies, it will not work in this study for three major reasons. First, there are no available surveys of children's European views. Eurobarometer surveys have only been conducted with adults. Moreover, the way Eurobarometer measures European identity - solely in relation/opposition to national identities - is rightly seen as problematic (Duchesne, 2006), because there are many other factors that play a role in relation to European identifications.

This is linked to the second issue, namely the fact that reliance on a single-survey question makes establishing the link between media representations and people's identities difficult. While it might give indications about the salience of the topic, it will not be very telling in providing explanations about the factors that create this salience. The roles of the mass media in identity formation cannot be established in isolation of other social and individual structures and processes. Thus, a number of factors might play a role in the development of children's European identities: school and parents, class and ethnicity, nationality and individual agency, to name a few. A good way of mapping out the different factors and the interplay between them is to follow Schlesinger's (1991) alternative to media-

centrism. He argues that instead of starting "with communication and its supposed effects on collective identity" (p. 150), researchers should begin with an analysis of collective identity and then move to the media's importance. This is exactly the approach adopted here: the study starts by investigating children's identities and then proceeds to examine the media coverage.

Third, another point to bear in mind is the potential difference between general topic salience and specific media focus in terms of thematic selection. While Europe or the EU might be present in the media, it is also important to look at how Europe is represented and what topics and actors dominate the coverage. Existing studies (De Vreese, 2001) show cross-national and sub-national differences in the selection of topics. Moreover, as Lang and Lang (2006) rightly point out, academics should be interested not only in what the "media convey" but also in "what they leave out. The topics, events, facts, issues, arguments, personalities, and political figures that never make it into this public forum have consequences, short-term and long-range" (p. 171). In other words, children's level of knowledge and potentially, degree of European identification, might be better explained if accounting for the missing symbols, personalities and stories as well as those that dominate the media agenda. If children do not recognize an important European personality such as the European Commission President, it is worth checking whether these people are present in European coverage. In addition to that, studies (Eder, 2009; Slavtcheva-Petkova & Mihelj, in press) have shown that how Europe is defined is key to whether people identify with it.

To avoid both the pitfalls of a single-survey question and media-centrism, prior to the media analysis the study explores children's views through a semi-ethnographic approach, namely in-depth qualitative individual interviewing. This "marriage" between what some might regard as two conflicting perspectives – agenda setting and an audience focus - will

allow for a much better capturing of the media's agenda-setting power within this specific audience.

What aspects of the relationship between the mass media and children, however, are peculiar to that age group, so making children interesting and important research participants? Indisputably, TV is an important actor in children's lives. Studies show that children are frequent, often heavy media users and over their youth they will spend more time watching TV than in schools (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001) or with peers (Larson, 1995). Paik (2001) argues that youngsters reach a "peak" (p. 15) in TV viewing at nine. A recent report (Ofcom, 2010) demonstrates that 94% of 8-11-year olds in the UK watch TV every day.

The media, and especially TV, are also main socialization agents, but TV's role "is a function of its interaction with other agents" (Lemish, 2007, p. 103). This role has often been researched in the context of political socialization (Buckingham, 1997; Conway et al., 1981; McLeod, 2000). TV is regarded as the first (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001) and therefore quite influential source of political information. It is, however, hard to predict whether European socialization is strictly political because it is unclear what definition of Europe children will give – they may understand Europe as a continent. Bruter (2005), for instance, differentiates between a civic and a cultural understanding of European identity. The former implies a reference to the EU and the latter to Europe as a continent or civilization. It will be interesting to reveal what children's understanding of Europe is.

The only assumption is that European stories are more likely to appear in news programs. Although children's relationship with news has also not been that extensively studied, a few findings in the literature are of relevance. Buckingham (2000) claims, for instance, that even if children are not interested in news, they "may often have little choice

but to watch it" and "to absorb information … in fragments, during the course of other activities" (p. 9). Recent findings (Carter, Davies, Allan, & Mendes, 2009) in the UK imply that despite the advent of the Internet, TV is their main source of news as indicated by 52% as opposed to only 6.9% who quote newspapers, the Internet, or radio. Lemish (2007) shows, however, that "in different societies" children are "socialized differently to the role of news" (p. 13). This is an important point to bear in mind when comparing the situation in two different countries. More generally, scholarship has demonstrated that children "actively make meaning and pleasure from television" (Buckingham, 1993, p. vii).

Even though both researchers and policy-makers do not appear to be interested in children's European-ness, as Barrett (2007) shows, pupils actively take part in the process of collective identities. Studies (Barrett, 2007) have shown that from as early as the age of 6 children select a national identity and by 9 they attribute considerable significance to it. Subsequently, by 10 they might endorse a supranational identity such as the European one (Barrett, 1996). Therefore, it makes sense to investigate the role the media play in the development of European identities at the age of 9-10, because this is when children are most exposed to TV (Paik, 2001), already have a national identity, and might aspire towards a supranational one.

Before moving on the specific research questions, it is worth explaining why exactly Bulgaria and England are compared. Two reasons guided the choice of a most different systems design, which is about comparing starkly different rather than closely similar countries. First, the authors of the most different systems design Przeworski and Teune (1970) claim it is more suitable than the most similar systems design when the research interest is "at a level lower than that of systems" (p. 34) such as individuals, groups, communities. This is exactly the case in the current study where the researcher is interested in a specific age group, namely 9/10-year-old children. In Livingstone's (2003) view, it

makes sense to analyze similar countries only when the focus of the study is on a specific nation. Second, the article explores children's European knowledge and identities. Given that the EU is a supranational organization, which encompasses as many as 27 different member states, it makes sense to compare two different rather than two similar countries in order to gain a better understanding of the different factors that could potentially influence the process of European identity. As Livingstone (2012) argues, selecting countries because of a "shared membership of the EU" (p. 425) is a good approach in cross-national comparative studies.

Research Questions

The general question to be pursued is what role the mass media play in the development of children's European knowledge and identities. It involves three specific questions:

RQ1: How salient are Europe and the EU in children's lives in terms of awareness, knowledge of actors and symbols, meanings and European identities?

RQ2: Which channels of mass communication do children use as sources of information on Europe and the EU? How salient are Europe and the EU on the media agenda in terms of frequency, themes, actors and symbols?

RQ3: What are the differences and similarities between children's accounts and the media coverage?

Methodology

The methodological design incorporates both quantitative and qualitative approaches, because as Deacon, Pickering, Golding, and Murdock (2007) argue, "many of the most interesting questions facing communications research are best tackled by combining different

research methods" (p. 3). The study consists of two elements: qualitative interviews with 174 children in 10 schools in Bulgaria and England, and content analysis of seven TV programmes – three in Bulgaria and four in the UK. As already indicated, the study follows Schlesinger's (1991) advice to start with collective identity and then to establish the media's roles, which means that in this section the focus will be first on the interviews and then on the content analysis.

Children's Interviews

Participants and Procedures. 174 children took part in the study. They were recruited through schools as this is the most ethically acceptable procedure. Pupils from six schools in England and ten in Bulgaria took part, and active consent was sought both from pupils and their parents. Interviews took place between February 2009 and February 2010. Theoretical sampling guided the recruitment. When constructing the sample, the goal was to achieve a degree of randomness in drawing the sub-populations. Once a school was approached all children in the respective age group were asked to participate. The head teachers of schools whose catchment areas cover different socio-economic characteristics (as determined by their Ofsted reports in England and by local council statistics in Bulgaria) were approached to ensure a fair representation of socio-economic groups.[1] Two towns of fairly small size and distance from the capital city were included. In Bulgaria the head teachers of all four schools approached agreed to participate, while in England six out of the twelve schools approached took part. Once the first consent forms were returned and interviews conducted, the further choice of schools was based on the same principle, namely inclusion of as many diverse backgrounds as possible.

Measures. Children's views were researched through semi-structured in-depth individual interviews. The questionnaire was tested in a pilot study with 50 pupils and

revised afterwards. Surveys with parents complemented the children's self-reports to achieve triangulation. The interviews consisted of three groups of questions. In the first part, children were asked demographic questions. In the second part they had to report on their media use. In the third part children were asked identity questions and ones related to Europe and the EU.[1] The questions used in this article are:

1. Salience of Europe and the EU in children's lives: "Have you heard of Europe? Have you heard of the European Union? Do you know what Europe is? Do you know what the European Union is? What do you think Europe is? What do you think the European Union is? Are you European? What does it mean to be European?" Children were also shown photographs with people and symbols such as their country's representative in the European Commission, the European Commission President, the EU flag, the euro coin, etc. and were asked: "Do you recognize this person?" or "Have you seen this?" If the answer was yes, then they were subsequently asked: "Who is that person?" or "What is this?"

2. Sources of information on Europe and the EU. If a child replied "yes" to the questions "Have you heard of Europe?" or "Have you heard of the EU?", they were asked, "How did you hear about Europe?" or "How did you hear about the EU?" The latter questions were asked as open-ended in order to avoid social desirability. Moreover, though it later became clear that not all children differentiate between Europe and the EU, it was important to ask separate questions to reveal whether children could establish the difference between the two (Bruter, 2005). It is worth noting that the two questions were not asked in a vacuum: they were related to the general questions on children's awareness of Europe and the EU, and were followed-up by questions about where exactly and what exactly children remember hearing about Europe and/or the EU so that the researcher can conclude on the reliability of the answers. Subsequently, when children were shown different photographs of people, they were always asked where they heard about this person or symbol. All answers

were then compared for triangulation purposes. When in doubt about the answers of a particular child, clarification was sought through further questions.

Analysis of the quantitative questions in the interviews was conducted in PASW Statistics 17 using the relevant statistical procedures. The open questions were thematically analyzed, namely the data were "read for analytic themes" (Fielding, 2001, p. 159). The coding took place in two main stages: "initial" and "focused" coding (Charmaz, 2006, p. 42). In the initial phase, the researcher was coding on the basis of "in vivo" codes (Charmaz, 2006) – the original terms, used by the participants. Then, in the second stage, decisions were made about which initial codes to categorize and how to group them together. Negative case analysis was employed for quality of interpretation purposes, namely all cases were further analyzed if they appeared to deviate from or contradict the explanations emerging from the data analysis (for example, on relationships between news viewing and awareness of Europe). A second researcher also looked at all qualitative extracts to verify the applicability of the general categories and for reliability to be established.

Media Content Analysis

Sampling. The sample was based on the results about use and sources of information on Europe and the EU in the pilot study. The aim was to determine the media sample on the basis of children's actual viewing patterns. The pilot showed that TV was the main source of news for children and the most important source on Europe and the EU among all mass media, which is why, the sample consisted only of TV programs: the ones most viewed by children. In Bulgaria, these were two news editions (*bTV Novinite* and *Calendar*) and a breakfast show (*Zdravey, Bulgaria*), aired by the two biggest private TV channels – *bTV* and *Nova TV*. In England, these were three news' emissions (*BBC1 News, ITV1 News,* the children's news program *Newsround)* and a children's magazine show (*Blue Peter*), aired by

the non-commercial public service broadcaster BBC and the commercial public channel ITV. As evident, in the Bulgarian case there are no programs specifically targeted at younger viewers. This is hardly surprising, given that in Bulgaria there is no tradition of children's programming with educational or informational purposes. In fact, there are no children's news programmes. This difference between the Bulgarian and the English sample is important, because it might mean that in general children are exposed to a different type of news-related program and hence acquire a different kind of information: "lighter" and more easily comprehendible in the English case, given that the news program children watch the most in the UK is the one specifically targeted at them - *Newsround*. This difference is a reflection of the children's actual viewing patterns and should therefore be preserved.

The sample was collected through a constructed week sampling on the following days: 18 November 2009, 10 December 2009, 18 December 2009, 12 January 2010, 18 January 2010, 30 January 2010 and 7 February 2010. The aim was to catch a snapshot of typical coverage in a fairly average, non-event period. Non-event means no Europe/EU-related major event took place, which could have triggered more European coverage than usual. Bryman (2004) claims this is a good approach in cases when the research question "entails an ongoing general phenomenon" (p. 186). Other researchers (Riffe et al., 1993) also argue that constructed week sampling is an efficient way of sampling.

Measures. The representations of the EU and Europe in the media were researched through content analysis. Content analysis as a quantitative method is especially appropriate because the aim is to reveal the salience of Europe on the media agenda and the focus of the coverage in thematic terms. The main unit of analysis was any news or current affairs program item with one of the following references: European, Europe, EU, Europa, or Euro. Salience was measured by establishing how frequently such references appeared in comparison with all other topics on the agenda and in terms of overall time share. Another

aim was to establish what kind of topics, actors, and symbols dominated the European stories, namely how the media describe Europe and the EU. A detailed coding frame was developed, which is available upon request for trackability and replicability purposes.

The analysis of the quantitative questions was conducted in PASW Statistics 17. All media clips were coded by the principal investigator and 10% of the sample was re-coded by a second independent coder. Inter-rater reliability was tested by using Krippendorff's (2004, pp. 211-243) alpha, which is within the acceptable limits - .8012. All sentences with European/EU/Europe//Euro reference in the media texts were thematically analyzed, again following the two-stage process.

Europe's Salience in Children's Lives

This section addresses the first research question, namely how salient Europe and the EU are in children's lives in terms of awareness, knowledge of actors and symbols, meanings and European identities. The results suggest a different level of salience of the European topic in Bulgaria and England. In Bulgaria the EU is a much more visible actor in contrast to England where the same trend holds true for Europe (Table 1). Thus, 71% of Bulgarian children have heard of the EU as opposed to 42% in England and the difference is statistically significant as $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 14.64$, $p < 0.001$. This difference in awareness can perhaps be explained by the fact that Bulgaria is a new member of the EU and the topic is indeed high on the agenda, as recent studies (Mantarova & Zaharieva, 2008) show.

Insert Table 1 about here

The same picture emerges with regard to knowledge about Europe and the EU. Again, English children are more knowledgeable about Europe, and Bulgarians are much better acquainted with the EU symbols and personalities. Many more Bulgarian (84%) than

English children (49%) have seen the EU flag, $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 24.16$, $p < 0.001$. Not all children who recognize the EU flag, however, know that this is the EU flag, which partially explains why the percentage of Bulgarian children who have seen the EU flag (84%) is higher than the percentage of those who know the EU (72%). Thus, 72% of those who recognize it in Bulgaria are able to explain what it is – for 43% of them it is the flag of the EU, for 29.3% of Europe and 27.7% define it as the "European" flag. By contrast, in England only 54.5% of those who say they have seen the flag know what it is. Half of them describe it as the European flag, a third as the EU flag and the rest as Europe's or another county's flag. Comparison with the media content analysis provides further explanation of these differences.

Another difference is the level of recognition of the European Commissioners. Nearly half of the Eastern Europeans recognize their representative in the European Commission as opposed to only 6% of English pupils and the difference is statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 30.85$, $p < 0.001$. Prior to becoming a European commissioner, Meglena Kuneva was a high-profile Bulgarian politician – initially a Member of Parliament, then a European government minister with consistently high ranking in the opinion polls. Catherine Ashton, on the other hand, was a very low-profile figure, highly criticized in the media for not being an elected politician. The euro, on the other hand, reveals a somewhat different trend. It looks familiar to 20% more English than Bulgarian children, $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 11.01$, $p < 0.001$, but only 13% of the former in contrast to 33% of the latter think it is the currency of Europe. All others say it is a national currency. Finally, the EU personalities – past and present – are virtually unrecognizable.

If Bulgarian pupils know more about the EU and its symbols than their English peers, is their European identity also more salient? On the contrary. More English (52%) than Bulgarian children (37%) say they are European, although the difference is not highly

significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 174) = 4.47$, $p = 0.11$. Apparently, knowledge, especially about the EU, does not necessarily imply identification. Part of the explanation is in the meanings young people attach to Europe, which are perhaps a reflection of the dominating socialization agents' discourses on the topic. Children in the two countries hold thematically different perceptions of Europe and the EU. The biggest group (29%) in Bulgaria volunteer the word state when describing Europe. The second most common depiction is a continent (20%) – a word that tops up the English accounts (48%). A closer look suggests that Bulgarian children often put an equation mark between Europe and the EU. Nearly a fifth (18%) state that Europe is the EU, but even some of those who opt for a geographical definition load it with political implications. For example, a girl says, Europe is "a continent, in Europe they accepted Italy, Bulgaria, Austria". The word accepted is part of the EU jargon for accession and candidate countries.

These results imply that when children define Europe as a continent, they find it easier to identify with; their geographical location determines their European identity as if it is a given. This is much more common in England than in Bulgaria. For the pupils who equate Europe with the EU, on the other hand, endorsing the identity is more problematic because they feel they need to be accepted first to the exclusive club to become European. And quite a few Bulgarian children emphasize that being accepted is not that easy.

Analysis of the "What does it mean to be European?" question adds another layer to the interpretation. The majority of Bulgarian children tend to describe Europe and the EU in idealistic terms – they talk about how beautiful, nice, or well-organized it is (as in the opening quotations of the article). But, the depictions are either in the future tense ("there won't be holes in the street any more") or clearly treat Europe as an out-group ("there are a lot of things, which we don't have here"). All in all, the impression children create is that they have not actually experienced this ideal Europe in their home country. They keep

talking about hopes and expectations about the future rather than a reality. They might have been abroad and seen how nice it is, or they might have heard about it on the news, but they are obviously still waiting for the changes to happen so that they can internalize a European identity. In England, on the other hand, there are hardly any traces of idealism. The children who describe Europe in positive terms are those who know a lot about it – either because of their experience in their own country or because they have been on holidays in other European countries. Moreover, they never "mix" Europe with the EU.

Europe's Salience on TV

What role do the media play then for children's European awareness and identities? This section deals with the second research question about children's sources of information on Europe and the EU and the salience of Europe and the EU on the media agenda in terms of frequency, themes, actors and symbols. To start with, TV is children's most important media source on Europe and the EU (Table 2). In Bulgaria, it is a more significant source than the other socialization agents – parents and school. There are, however, interesting national differences, which seem consistent with the varying levels of knowledge and identification among children. In both countries, TV is the main source of information about the EU, although it is quoted by considerably fewer children in England (22%) than in Bulgaria (54%), $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 17.13$, $p < 0.001$. With respect to Europe, differences are equally telling: in Bulgaria TV again tops the table, while in England school is considered a more important source than TV, $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 16$, $p < 0.001$, and parents are accorded the same importance as television, $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 18.62$, $p < 0.001$. All differences are statistically significant. It is also worth noting that the majority of English children indicate they hardly have any sources of information on the EU, while they do mention a number of sources on Europe – a result that can help account for their lower levels of knowledge about the EU. It

is feasible to suggest that these disparities result from the lower salience of Europe and in particular the EU in British media.

Insert Table 2 about here

The media content analysis confirms this expectation. In terms of frequency, European stories tend to appear much more often on Bulgarian than on British TV (Graph 1). There are only 14 out of 202 stories with reference to Europe, EU, European, or Euro in the UK, whereas in Bulgaria 67 out of the 355 items have such references. In a further 27 Bulgarian stories the EU flag appears in the video footage without any textual reference. Therefore, there are roughly 2.5 times more European stories both in terms of time-share and number of stories in Bulgaria than in the UK. The least number of European references are in fact in the news program English children watch the most – *Newsround* - and the EU flag appears only once. By contrast, programs popular among Bulgarian children are among those where European stories are most frequent, and the EU flag is used for illustration purposes in nearly a fifth of all stories.

Insert Graph 1 about here

The considerably higher frequency of European stories in Bulgarian media is in accordance with previous results on children's awareness of Europe and the EU. Bulgarian children were clearly much more aware of the existence of the EU than their British counterparts and more likely to recognize the EU flag. However, it is important to recall that awareness about the EU did not necessarily lead to identification with it. As argued earlier, this has to do with the meanings Bulgarian children attach to Europe, which differ considerably from those invoked by English children.

As expected, the thematic analysis shows that similar differences in meanings appear in the media. First, there is a clear EU focus in Bulgaria: half (52%) of the 67 stories are with reference to the Union. Of them, 40% are about EU policies and policy-making. Examples include pieces about EU funds and subsidies, rules and regulations about the single market, and European directives – from the replacement of bulbs to the compulsory percentage of independent productions on TV. Nearly a third (31%) are specifically about certain implications of Bulgaria's membership. The remaining EU stories (29%) are about the political aspects of membership such as summits and Turkey's membership. As a whole, the majority of EU items are about the daily business in the Union, and most of them are reported through Bulgarian lenses, namely what certain EU events or decisions mean for Bulgarians.

The second biggest category (31%) includes stories that use the words European, Euro, or Europa without a specific reference to either Europe or the EU. The majority are sports news, mainly football ones such as the Euro 2012 draw or the Europa League.

Finally, the third major category (16%) has specific reference to Europe. It is interesting, however, that nearly two thirds (64%) of these depict Europe as something Bulgaria is looking up to – an excellent example to be followed but not yet accomplished. Often the main topic is entirely unrelated to Europe, but the reporters insert a sentence or two to justify a certain policy-maker's decision through reference to the European example. Thus, one of the news items is about the health reform in Bulgaria. "The European example shows that there are too many hospitals in our country," a reporter concludes without backing her remark with any facts. Similarly, in another story on possible new traffic regulations in Sofia, the journalist says that the driving idea behind the new rules is for Sofia to become as one of the "European capitals with developed infrastructure". Other examples include Bulgaria described as the country with the "most ageing population in Europe", or "first in Europe in number of heart and brain diseases", or "most corrupted". A similar putting down

is even evident in the sports news, where according to one presenter the auto union calendar is "in contradiction with the European one". In all stories, the comparison between Bulgaria and Europe is detrimental for Bulgaria. Europe is depicted as an out-group, whose example the new EU member should follow to become truly European.

By contrast, in the UK, when Britain is perceived as part of Europe, it is portrayed as an equal and fully-fledged part. It is difficult to generalize about the kind of European stories that tend to appear on British TV, given the overall low number of references - 14. Nonetheless, twice as many (43%) are with reference to Europe as to the EU (21%). Half of the European stories are about Britain being part of Europe. Examples include a news item about a cancer drug that will be available in the UK "as well as the rest of Europe", or ringtone website payments, which are seen as a "big problem in this country and around Europe". Similarly, two of the three EU stories are about Britain's EU membership. One is about the failed nomination of Tony Blair for the newly created post of EU President, and the other one focuses on the new UK visa rules for non-EU students. The third one is about the EU pledge to help Haiti after the earthquake. As a whole, Europe and the EU are mostly depicted as an in-group in the few stories that ever appear on the topic.

It is also important to outline briefly what kinds of actors and illustrations dominate the stories to see if there are parallels with children's accounts. As expected, there are more stories with reference to European actors in the new rather than the old member-state. Although in Bulgaria only two EU representatives appear in more than one story, the European Commission is present in nearly a quarter (23%) and the European Parliament in 12%. A quarter include footage of the EU flag, and it is considerably more recognizable among Bulgarian children. This is hardly surprising given that in most press conference rooms the Bulgarian and the EU flags are behind the backs of the speakers. Hence, it is almost inevitable when including a direct quote from an authority figure to show footage of

the flags. The flags are always there, but hardly anyone notices them. Their constant appearance is a perfect example of banal nationalism and perhaps Europeanism in the making, where indeed the symbols of nationhood and Europe are daily "flagged in the eyes of its citizenry" (Billig, 1995, p. 6). Yet, it is still a banal Europeanism in the making because, as the results show, the European identity is certainly not yet banal. By contrast, in Britain there are no traces of banal Europeanism, originating from or distributed through the media. The EU flag is present in only one story, there are no references to EU actors and only one to a European institution. The EU figures – both past and present – are virtually "invisible".

Differences and Similarities between Children's Accounts and TV Coverage

This section addresses the third research question concerning the differences and similarities between the children's accounts and the media coverage. The discourses and actors in the European coverage, especially in Bulgaria, are similar to the ones in children's accounts. In Bulgaria, the EU is a much more salient actor on TV and children are much more aware of its existence. They often describe Europe as equivalent to the EU, and it is more often a distant dream or a political entity they are aiming to become part of not only in flesh but also in spirit. Hence, the strong agenda-setting role the media play in Bulgaria seems indisputable. This role, however, is not that straightforward in England. It is much more difficult to claim a close link between children's descriptions and media messages mainly because the topic is hardly ever present. Awareness especially about the EU is very low - not surprising, given the very low frequency on TV. Therefore, the preliminary conclusion is fairly straightforward: The media's agenda-setting function is much stronger when a topic is rendered important enough to prompt a significant proportion of coverage. The higher the salience of an issue the more powerful the media are in "telling" the viewers "what to think *about*" (Cohen, 1963, p. 13).

If agenda-setting theory explains fairly well the association between children's awareness and the salience of the European topic on TV, this is hardly the case when delving deeper in search of a relationship between identification and topic prominence. In spite of the fact that Bulgarian rather than English media report considerably more on European topics and focus extensively on the EU, and Bulgarian children are therefore much more knowledgeable about the EU, their European identities still seem to be considerably weaker. Why? Part of the explanation is that the media in Bulgaria offer an idealistic description of Europe and hence, a wishful identity, which is very difficult to endorse, while in Britain Europe is described as a reality, and therefore, it is much easier to appropriate this collective identity. However, this account, which suggests direct media effects, hardly grasps the complexity in the relationship between identity construction and the media.

The best illustration comes from the qualitative questions in the Bulgarian interviews, where children often describe their notions of Europe in relation to what they have heard on the news (since they are indeed regularly exposed to the subject-matter). Thus, one boy says, "Europeans were much more developed before, now we are catching up. That's what they said on the news." This child appropriates a notion of Europe similar to the one the media actively promote – of an ideal Bulgaria needs to catch up with, but for him this is hardly problematic. He says he is European, and in the follow-up questions he mentions he is quite happy that his country is part of the European project. By contrast, another boy says he has heard on TV that "there are more things there, life is better but people are more hardworking and lonely". His is also an idealized description of Europe, though with a touch of "reality", but he does not endorse the European identity. Similarly, four children mention they know from the news that Europe is "beautiful," but two of them define themselves as European, and two do not. So, even when children are fairly frequently exposed to media messages about Europe, as in Bulgaria, they do not unequivocally endorse a European identity not only

because to an extent the media depict an idealized identity that is difficult to embrace but also because young people draw on their other available resources and actively engage in the identity process. Identity is not fixed, however, which means that children do not make firm and straightforward decisions of whether to internalize the respective collective identities. The excerpt below, which comes from an interview with a 9-year-old girl and part of which is used as a title for the paper, partially illustrates this process:

Interviewer: Do you feel European?

Child: Not much.

Interviewer: Who do you think is European?

Child: I'm from Bulgaria and Bulgaria is in Europe.

Interviewer: But this does not make you feel European?

Child: No, it doesn't. I just don't feel like it.

This girl quite clearly understands that her home country is part of Europe but she does not really feel European. It is very interesting to note that she cannot point to a single reason that makes her feel that way, which is in line with this paper's general understanding of identity as an active process, influenced by a plethora of factors. What the above quotation shows is that collective identities develop as a result of the interplay between different factors and the mass media definitely play a role in that process. Other factors that seem to play a role are children's socio-economic status and ethnicity as well as individual teacher's initiative and parental mediation on European-related topics. These are analyzed in more detail elsewhere (Slavtcheva-Petkova & Mihelj, in press). This article quite clearly indicates, however, that it is difficult to establish the role of the mass media if looking for

direct correlations between media representations and children's perceptions, because the media's role can be better understood if studied in relation to all other influences.

Conclusion

All in all, the results of the study show that the "media/identity relationship" is indeed "not a causal one" (Madianou, 2005, p. 5). TV does not have a direct effect on children's identities but a long-term, indirect influence, contingent on national context. Children are not passive dupes, easily appropriating dominating "take-away" TV messages. They actively make sense of what they view. TV's role is immense, because it is an authoritative source of information on European topics, as both the quantitative data on children's sources of information on the EU and the qualitative questions in the interviews confirm. It provides pupils with the necessary resources in terms of awareness and knowledge to make sense of the topic, but girls and boys are "active and creative social agents" (Corsaro, 2005, p. 3), in general, and more specifically as media users (Buckingham, 2003; Gauntlett, 1997), who endorse some collective identities rather than others at given periods of their lives. Moreover, the kind of messages distributed on the topic are at least as important for the development and strength of a European identity as the degree of proliferation of information about it. The frequent reoccurrence of the subject on the media agenda certainly guarantees higher awareness. Awareness is in turn a prerequisite for knowledge and without awareness or knowledge, there is no European identity. Thus, the data support the expectation expressed in official EU documents that a "European identity will only develop if Europeans are adequately informed" (European Commission, 1984, p. 2). Yet, in a country like England where children hardly ever hear about Europe or the EU from the media, there are still more of them who say they are European. Individual agency and TV as a socialization agent are obviously not the only factors that help explain how this process works.

To better grasp the mass media's role in children's collective identities, it is reasonable to consider the importance of other influences such as school and parents as well as social structures and the interplay between them. As Lang and Lang (2006) point out, it is not enough to establish the correspondence between the stories the media cover and people's knowledge and perceptions because the missing stories and personalities might be equally important. This study demonstrates that quite a few important personalities in the history and present affairs of the EU are virtually "invisible" in media texts about Europe and this inevitably plays a role in children's identifications and knowledge. Most of these people are unfamiliar to the children but they do point out that they recognize a number of symbols and people from elsewhere: school, parents, etc. Moreover, the relationship between specific audiences and media texts is multi-faceted – contrary to the impression created by some agenda-setting studies, which rely on a single-survey question (for a critique see Rogers & Dearing, 2007). Even though the agenda-setting function of the mass media is indisputable when it comes to topic salience, it is considerably more difficult to "unpack" the media's role when attempting to establish the correspondence between the views and identities of specific audiences and the media coverage on a given topic. This article enriches the understanding of the agenda-setting role of the media by looking exactly at the correspondence between the views and identities of specific audiences and the media coverage in the programs they actually watch.

Nonetheless, this study is not without its limitations and it is worth finishing off with a few caveats. First, although attempting to avoid media-centrism, it does concentrate on the role of the media and hence, does not explore in sufficient detail the interplay between a variety of factors: a task for future research. Second, the study relies on self-reported measures and even though it utilizes a combination of closed- and open-ended questions, social desirability is still an issue. Third, the sample is not representative and the findings

cannot be generalized to the whole population. Future larger-scale studies and ones involving longitudinal designs can provide additional insights into the potential for generalization of the quantitative findings as well as the possible age and national differences. Fourth, there are a lot of qualitative data, which are not used in this article. Nonetheless, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data is an asset of this study because there is a constant interplay between them. The qualitative questions are used both as a basis for further inquiry into some of the trends indicated and as a good illustration and explanation of the quantitative data. The open questions in the interviews can provide additional insights about the importance of discourse and interaction in the negotiation of identities. Finally, the study was conducted at the onset of the economic crisis and worldwide recession. It will be interesting to see what role the arguably increased coverage of European topics, mainly in relation to the downturn of the Eurozone and the difficulties some countries such as Greece experience, will play in children's perceptions and identifications.

NOTES

1. All research instruments as well as detailed descriptions of the samples are available upon request.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Professor Michael Pickering and Dr Sabina Mihelj, Loughborough University, UK, for their encouragement and guidance as well as the three anonymous reviewers and Professor Dafna Lemish, co-editor of the Journal of Children and Media, for their invaluable suggestions and help with improving this manuscript.

REFERENCES

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* London, England: Verso.

Austin, E. W., & Pinkleton, B. (2001). The role of parental mediation in the political socialization process. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *45*(2), 221–240.

Barrett, M. (1996). English children's acquisition of a European identity. In G. Breakwell & E. Lyons (Eds.), *Changing European identities: Social psychological analyses of social change* (pp. 349–370). Oxford, England: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Barrett, M. (2007). *Children's knowledge, beliefs and feelings about nations and national groups.* New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism.* London, England: Sage.

Bruter, M. (2005). *Citizens of Europe? The emergence of a mass European identity*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave.

Bryman, A. (2004). *Social research methods.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Buckingham, D. (1993). *Children talking television: The making of television literacy.* London, England: The Falmer Press.

Buckingham, D. (1997). News media, political socialization and popular citizenship: Toward a new agenda. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *14*(4), 344–366.

Buckingham, D. (2000). *The making of citizens: Young people, news and politics.* London, England: Routledge.

Buckingham, D. (2003). Children and television: A critical overview of the research. In V. Nightingale & K. Ross: *Critical readings: Media and audiences* (pp. 163–180). Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

Carter, C., Davies, M. M., Allan, S., & Mendes, K. (2009). What do children want from the BBC? Children's content and participatory environments in an age of citizen media. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/knowledgeexchange/cardifftwo.pdf

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* London, England: Sage.

Cohen, B. (1963). *The press and foreign policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Conway, M. M., Wyckoff, M., Feldbaum, E., & Ahern, D. (1981). The news media in children's political socialization. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 45*(2), 164–178.

Corsaro, W. (2005). *The sociology of childhood*. London, England: Pine Forge Press.

Cram, L. (2009). Identity and European integration: diversity as a source of integration. *Nations and Nationalism, 15*(1), 109–128. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00367.x

Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P., & Murdock, G. (2007). *Researching communications: A practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis.* London, England: Arnold.

De Vreese, C. (2001). Europe in the news: A cross-national comparative study of the news coverage of key EU events. *European Union Politics, 2*(3), 283–307.

Downing, J., & Husband, C. (2005). *Representing race, ethnicities and the media.* London, England: Sage.

Eder, K. (2009) A theory of collective identity. Making sense of the debate on a 'European identity.' *European Journal of Social Theory, 4*(12): 427–447.

European Commission. (1984). *Television without frontiers: Green paper on the establishment of the common market for broadcasting, especially by satellite and cable.*

Fielding, N. (2001). Ethnography. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching social life* (pp. 145–163). London, England: Sage.

Gauntlett, D. (1997). *Video critical: Children, the environment and media power*. Luton, England: John Libbey Media.

Gauntlett, D. (2002). *Media, gender and identity.* London, England: Routledge

Georgiou, M. (2001). Crossing the boundaries of the ethnic home: Media consumption and ethnic identity construction in the public space: The case of the Cypriot community centre in North London. *International Communication Gazette, 63*(4), 311–329.

Hengst, H. (1997). Negotiating 'us' and 'them': Children's constructions of collective identity. *Childhood*, *4*(1), 43–62.

Huntemann, N. & Morgan, M. (2001). Mass media and identity development. In D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of children and the media* (pp. 309–323). London, England: Sage.

Larson, R. (1995). Secrets in the bedroom: Adolescents' private use of media. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 24*(5), 535–550.

Lemish, Dafna. (2007). *Children and television: A global perspective.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Livingstone, S. (2003). On the challenges of cross-national comparative media research. *European Journal of Communication, 18*(4), 477–500.

Livingstone, S. (2012). Challenges to comparative research in a globalizing media landscape. In F. Essler & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *Handbook of comparative communication research* (pp. 415–429). New York, NY: Routledge.

Madianou, M. (2005). *Mediating the nation*. London, England: UCL Press.

Mantarova, A., & Zaharieva, M. (2008). *България в Европейския съюз: Очаквания и реалности.* Sofia, Bulgaria: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176–187.

McLeod, J. (2000). Media and civic socialization of youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *27*(2), 45–51.

Morley, D. (2000). *Home territories: Media, mobility and identity.* London, England: Routledge.

Ofcom's UK children's media literacy report. (2010, March). Retrieved from http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/full_report.pdf

Paik, H. (2001). The history of children's use of electronic media. In D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of children and the media* (pp. 7–28). London, England: Sage.

Przeworski, A., & Teune, H. (1970). *The logic of comparative social inquiry.* London, England: Wiley-Interscience.

Riffe, D., Aust, C., & Lacy, S. (1993). The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis. *Journalism Quarterly*, *70*(1), 133–139.

Rogers, E. M., & Dearing, J. W. (2007). Agenda-setting research: Where has it been, where is it going? In D. Graber (Ed.). *Media Power in Politics* (pp. 80–97*). Washington, DC, USA: CQ Press.*

Schlesinger, P. (1991). *Media, state and nation: Political violence and collective identities.* London, England: Sage.

Schlesinger, P. (1997). From cultural defence to political culture: Media, politics and collective identity in the European Union. *Media, Culture and Society*, *19*(3), 369–391.

Slavtcheva-Petkova, V., & Mihelj, S. (In press). Europe – a default or a dream? European identity formation among Bulgarian and English children. *Ethnicities.*

TABLE 1

Children's European Knowledge and Identities (N = 174)

	Bulgaria		England	
	%	n	%	N
Have heard of Europe	71.9	77	91.1	61
Have heard of the EU	71	76	41.8	28
Have seen the EU flag	84.1	90	49.3	33
Have seen their country's European Commissioner	43.9	47	6	4
Have seen the euro coin	65.4	70	88.1	59
Define themselves as European	37.4	40	52.2	35

Note. Total number of children is 174: 107 in Bulgaria and 67 in England. All differences are statistically significant.

TABLE 2

Children's Sources of Information on Europe and the EU (N = 174)

	On Europe				On EU			
	Bulgaria		England		Bulgaria		England	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
TV	45.8	49	50.7	34	54.2	58	22.4	15
Parents	21.5	23	50.7	34	24.3	26	9	6
School	24.3	26	56.7	38	15.9	17	11.9	8
Radio	5.6	6	16.4	11	3.7	4	6	4
Newspapers	2.8	3	10.4	7	4.7	5	4.5	3
Internet	9.3	10	20.9	14	5.6	6	6	4

Note. Total number of children is 174: 107 in Bulgaria and 67 in England.

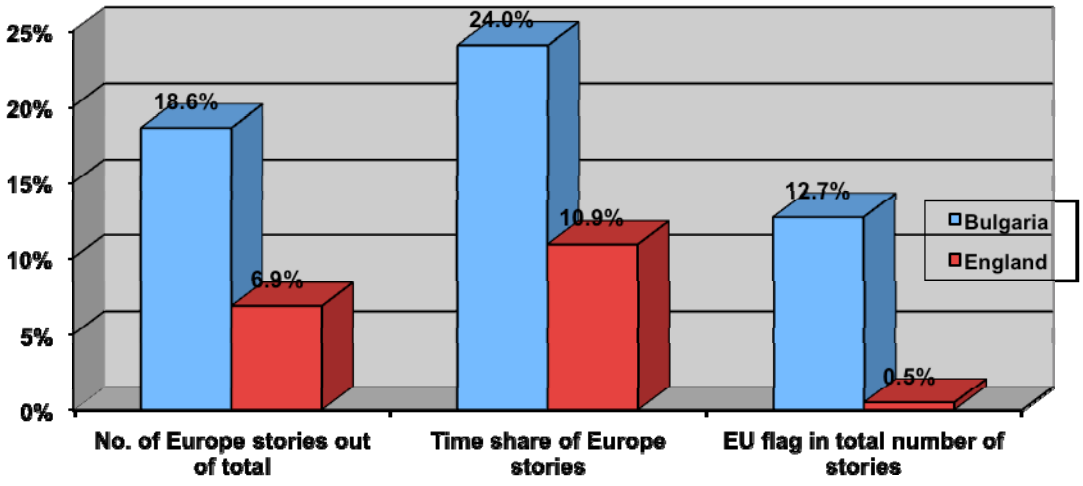

FIGURE 1

Frequency of European stories on Bulgarian and English TV